DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 371 JC 840 161

AUTHOR Greenfield, Richard K.
TITLE General Education in Community College Vocational Programs.
PUB DATE 29 Mar 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the National Workshop on General Education and Mission of the Community College (Princeton University, NJ, March 29, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Colleges; Core Curriculum; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Problems; Definitions; *Educational Objectives; *General Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

In analyzing the role of general education in community college vocational programs, one must begin by defining general education as part of the overall community college mission. Broadly defined, general education involves the study of the basic liberal arts and sciences; stresses a breadth of understanding of human knowledge; strives to foster integration and synthesis of knowledge; encourages the appreciation of one's own and others' heritage; examines values; and fosters the development of personal qualities. Given this definition and its goals, the general education curriculum would include advanced learning skills courses, breadth or discipline distribution courses, and integrative courses. Critics of the community college general education curriculum express concern over the neglect of advanced learning skills in English, language, and computation; the lack of general education courses deliberately designed for vocational and nonmajor students; and the paucity of truly effective integrative/interdisciplinary courses. Obstacles to general education reform include definitional problems, faculty resistance, lack of administrative support, lack of student interest, red tape, few working models, and stress on maximum occupational preparation. To overcome these obstacles, educational leaders and faculty must be willing to take risks and invest the time and energy necessary to approach the ideal of excellence and equity in mass higher education. (LAL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED242371

GENERAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Richard K. Greenfield
Chancellor
St. Louis Community College District

Presented at the National Workshop on General Education and Mission of the Community College (Princeton University, March 29, 1984).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard K. Greenfield

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

JC 840 161

GENERAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

THE TOPIC WE ARE TO DISCUSS TODAY IS GENERAL EDUCATION IN OUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS. FIRST, WE HAD BETTER ATTEMPT TO DEFINE GENERAL EDUCATION AND THE GOALS OF GENERAL EDUCATION AS ONE OF THE MISSIONS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES.

WHILE MOST STATEMENTS OF MISSION GIVE A FAIRLY CLEAR IDEA OF THE TRANSFER AND CAREER FUNCTIONS, THEY TEND TO GET VAGUE OR AMBIGUOUS IN THE AREAS OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION FUNCTION, CONTINUING EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES.

MANY COMMENTATORS CONCERNED WITH CURRICULAR REFORM, INCLUDING COHEN AND BRAWER IN THEIR BOOK, THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (1982), CONCLUDE THAT "...A GOOD PART OF THE DIFFICULTY WITH GENERAL EDUCATION RESTS WITH ITS DEFINITION." (P. 316). GAFF, IN HIS RECENT BOOK ON LIBERAL EDUCATION TODAY (1983),

Presented by Richard K. Greenfield, Chancellor, St. Louis Community College District, March 29, 1984, at the National Workshop on General Education & Mission of Community Colleges, Princeton University

COMMENTS THAT "...DESPITE ITS APPARENT SIMPLICITY AND COMMON CURRENCY, THE PHRASE GENERAL EDUCATION REMAINS AMBIGUOUS; AND ITS VARIOUS INTERPRETERS PROPOSE DIFFERENT STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND DIRECTIONS FOR REFORM." (P.3).

THE DEBATE OVER CURRICULAR REFORM AND QUALITY IN GENERAL EDUCATION IS ONCE AGAIN HEATING UP, AS IS SUMMARIZED IN GENERAL EDUCATION IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES, EDITED BY B. LAMAR JOHNSON AND PUBLISHED IN 1982. I THINK THAT GAFF'S ATTEMPT AT A BROAD DEFINITION IS PRETTY GOOD, VIZ:

"IN ITS BROADEST TERMS, GENERAL EDUCATION:

- IS ROOTED IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION AND INVOLVES STUDY OF THE BASIC LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES;

- STRESSES BREADTH AND PROVIDES STUDENTS WITH FAMILIARITY WITH VARIOUS BRANCHES OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING AS WELL AS THE METHODOLOGIES AND LANGUAGES PARTICULAR TO DIFFERENT BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE;

- STRIVES TO FOSTER INTEGRATION, SYNTHESIS, AND CONNECTEDNESS OF KNOWLEDGE RATHER THAN DISCRETE BITS OF SPECIALIZED INFORMATION;

- ENCOURAGES THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF ONE'S HERITAGE AS WELL AS RESPECT FOR OTHER PEOPLES AND CULTURES;

- INCLUDES AN EXAMINATION OF VALUES -- BOTH THOSE RELEVANT TO CURRENT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND THOSE IMPLICIT IN A DISCIPLINE'S METHODOLOGY;

- PRIZES A COMMON EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR AT LEAST PART OF THE COLLEGE YEARS;

- REQUIRES THE MASTERY OF THE LINGUISTIC, ANALYTICAL, CRITICAL AND COMPUTATIONAL SKILLS NECESSARY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING; AND

- FOSTERS THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL QUALITIES, SUCH

AS TOLERANCE OF AMBIGUITY, EMPATHY FOR PERSONS WITH DIFFERENT VALUES, AND AN EXPANDED VIEW OF SELF."

PERHAPS A SHORTER WAY OF PUTTING IT IS THAT "...GENERAL EDUCATION IS A MEDIATING INFLUENCE THAT, THROUGH INSTITUTION-WIDE REQUIREMENTS, ENSURES THAT ALL STUDENTS OBTAIN, FROM THE MANY COURSES AND PROGRAMS AN INSTITUTION MAY MAKE AVAILABLE, SOME KNOWLEDGE OF THE IDEAS AND CULTURE THAT WERE ONCE THEMES OF THE TOTAL LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE." (MISSIONS ...CARNEGIE FOUNDATION, PP. 164-5)

GIVEN THIS GENERAL SET OF DEFINITIONS, WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN TERMS OF GENERAL CURRICULUM STRUCTURE? SEVEN YEARS AGO, THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING STIMULATED THE GROWING CURRICULAR REFORM MOVEMENT BY PUBLISHING ITS MISSIONS OF THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM: A CONTEMPORARY REVIEW WITH SUGGESTIONS (1977). IN DISCUSSING THE THREE CURRICULUM COMPONENTS OF GENERAL EDUCATION, THE MAJOR, AND ELECTIVES, THE

REPORT STATED THE OBVIOUS FACT THAT GENERAL EDUCATION IS "GENERAL" IN THE LIMITED SENSE OF ITS BEING REQUIRED OF MOST OR ALL DEGREE-SEEKING STUDENTS. GENERAL EDUCATION AS DEFINED IN THIS REPORT, INCLUDES ONE, TWO OR ALL THREE OF THE COMPONENTS OF (1) ADVANCED LEARNING SKILLS COURSES; (2) "BREADTH," OR DISCIPLINE DISTRIBUTION COURSES; AND (3) INTEGRATIVE, I.E., "SYNOPTIC" COURSES.

THE FIRST IS A UNIVERSAL COMPONENT, FOR WE ALL SEEK TO IMPART SUFFICIENT LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICAL SKILLS NECESSARY FOR ANY FURTHER LEARNING, ABOVE AND BEYOND THE HUGE VOLUME OF REMEDIAL OR COMPENSATORY BASIC SKILLS COURSES WE HAVE TO PROVIDE IN THE FACE OF THE SEVERE HANDICAPS OF POOR BASIC SKILLS PERFORMANCE LEVELS EXHIBITED BY A MAJORITY OF OUR STUDENTS. ALSO UNIVERSAL FOR CERTIFICATE OR DEGREE STUDENTS IS THE TYPICAL DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENT ("SIX CREDITS OF THIS, THREE OF THAT, ETC."), AIMED AT GIVING VOCATIONAL PROGRAM STUDENTS A VERY

LIMITED SAMPLING OF THE MAJOR STREAMS OF THOUGHT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, THE SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES. TRULY INTEGRATIVE COURSES ARE RELATIVELY RARE, EVEN THOUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES SEEM TO BE GROWING IN POPULARITY, GIVING FEW OF OUR STUDENTS MUCH OPPORTUNITY TO COMPREHEND OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT AND THE PLACE OF THE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN IT, OR TO GRAPPLE WITH ISSUES OR PROBLEMS BEYOND THOSE WHICH MAY BE ADDRESSED IN ELECTIVE COURSES. IN BRIEF, FOR MANY VALID REASONS, WE DON'T COME CLOSE IF "...THE PURPOSE IS 'UNDERSTANDING,' AS WHITEHEAD (1938) DESIGNATED IT." (GAFF, P.10)

IT IS DIFFICULT NOT TO AGREE WITH THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION'S ASSESSMENT THAT "GENERAL EDUCATION IS NOW A DISASTER AREA" AND THAT "IT REPRESENTS THE ACCRETIONS OF HISTORY MORE THAN A THOUGHTFUL CONCERN FOR SPECIALIZED CURRENT NEEDS." (P.11) FEW OF US WOULD NOT SHARE THE FOUNDATION'S CONCERNS OVER THE NEGLECT OF ADVANCED LEARNING SKILLS IN ENGLISH, LANGUAGE AND

MATHEMATICS, THE WIDESPREAD USE OF INTRODUCTORY COURSES INTENDED FOR TRANSFER, OR A SMORGASBOARD OF AREA ELECTIVES, TO MEET THE "BREADTH" OR DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENTS INSTEAD OF COURSES DELIBERATELY DESIGNED FOR VOCATIONAL AND NONMAJOR STUDENTS. WE SHOULD ALSO BE CONCERNED OVER THE PAUCITY OF TRULY EFFECTIVE INTEGRATIVE, INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES OR REQUIREMENTS.

CONTRIBUTING TO MUCH OF THE FRUSTRATION OVER THE SEEMING LACK OF FOCUS OR COHERENCE IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION FUNCTION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES IS THE ATTEMPT ON OUR PART TO DO EVERYTHING WELL. AS BRAWER AND FRIEDLANDER STATED IN 1977 IN THEIR TOPICAL PAPER ON SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE,

> "BY PROCLAIMING THAT THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER TO ALL PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS AND ABILITIES, COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE OBLIGED TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND MEANINGFUL INSTRUCTIONAL OFFERINGS TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. THESE COLLEGES MUST DO SEVERAL THINGS

AND ADOPT A NUMBER OF APPROACHES IN ORDER TO FULFILL THE OBJECTIVES AND PROMISES OF THE OPEN-DOOR POLICY ... NON-TRANSFER STUDENTS ... SHOULD BE AFFORDED THE OPPORTUNITY OF TAKING A SCIENCE OR SOCIAL SCIENCE COURSE SUITABLE FOR THEIR ABILITIES AND INTERESTS ... MANY NON-TRANSFER STUDENTS ARE NEITHER WILLING NOR CAPABLE OF SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING A TRADITIONAL TRANSFER COURSE AND WILL EITHER AVOID IT OR, IF FORCED BY REQUIREMENTS TO ENROLL, WILL FAIL OR DROP OUT."

BECAUSE OF THE STRESS ON "BREAD AND BUTTER" IN OUR CAREER AND VOCATIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMS, THERE IS LITTLE ROOM LEFT FOR COURSES OR CREDIT HOURS IN GENERAL EDUCATION BEYOND THE BARE MINIMUM REQUIRED EITHER BY STATE LAW OR REGULATION OR FOR ACCREDITATION PURPOSES. TYPICALLY, 25 TO 30% OF THE TOTAL CREDIT HOURS IN A VOCATIONAL DEGREE PROGRAM MAY BE DEVOTED TO ENGLISH COMPOSITION (OR REPORT WRITING), AN ELECTIVE COURSE OR

TWO IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, A MATHEMATICS COURSE OR COURSES (INCLUDING "TECHNICAL MATH") AND A SCIENCE COURSE OR COURSES. ON RARER OCCASIONS, AN ELECTIVE HUMANITIES COURSE MAY BE THROWN IN. THIS, THEN, IS A COMMON PATTERN OF "DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENTS" WHICH PASSES AS GENERAL EDUCATION, WITH FEW, IF ANY, COURSES DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR NON-TRANSFER OR NON-MAJOR STUDENTS. GIVEN THE GROWING PREPONDERANCE OF PART-TIME STUDENTS WITH THEIR ONE OR TWO COURSE "STOP-IN AND STOP-OUT" PATTERN, THE IMPACT OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION DEGREE REQUIREMENTS IS EVEN LESS IN FACT THAN IT IS ON PAPER.

HAMMONS, IN A 1979 ARTICLE ENTITLED "GENERAL EDUCATION: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY RETURNS," TRACES THE LONG HISTORY OF CONCERN OVER GENERAL EDUCATION BUT THE EVIDENCE OF ONLY SPORADIC AND ISOLATED EFFORTS TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT. HE POINTS OUT ALL OF THE FAMILIAR OBSTACLES TO CHANGE IN GENERAL EDUCATION: DEFINITIONAL PROBLEMS, FACULTY RESISTANCE, LACK OF

ADMINISTRATIVE INTEREST OR SUPPORT, LACK OF STUDENT INTEREST, "RED TAPE" ASSOCIATED WITH CURRICULUM PROPOSALS, LACK OF DEMONSTRATED VALUE, FEW WORKING MODELS, FRACTURED STRUCTURE AND DEPARTMENTAL ORGANIZATION, LACK OF FACULTY INCENTIVES AND THE STRESS ON MAXIMUM OCCUPATIONAL PREPARATION OF A SPECIFIC NATURE. DESPITE THESE OBSTACLES, HE SEES DISTINCT POSSIBILITIES OF A FAIRLY WIDESPREAD REEXAMINATION OF GENERAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AS OTHERS FORECAST FOR ALL SEGMENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. MYRON MARTY, IN HIS PAPER WHICH WAS INCLUDED IN THE 1980 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY REPORT ON STRENGTHENING HUMANITIES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES, STRESSED THE NEED TO UPSET THE CURRENT IMBALANCE IN THE CURRICULA AND THE REAL DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING THE THEORY OF GENERAL EDUCATION INTO PRACTICE , BUT URGED SUCH REFORM EFFORTS AS ESSENTIAL TO THE FULFILLMENT OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION (PP. 57-70).

IT MAY BE TRUE THAT "THE 'THREE C'S DOMINATE OUR

COMMUNITY COLLEGES TODAY (CAREER, COMPENSATORY AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION)" (P.8, ASSEMBLY REPORT), BUT BOTH THE UNIVERSITY PARALLEL (TRANSFER) AND GENERAL EDUCATION FUNCTIONS ARE NOT DEAD. WHAT IS NEEDED TO BREATHE LIFE INTO THE GENERAL EDUCATION FUNCTION IN VOCATIONAL/CAREER PROGRAMS IS RECOGNITION OF THE "NEW REALITIES" OF OUR CLIENTELE, THE RAPID OBSOLESCENCE OF VERY SPECIFIC JOB KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AND THE NEED FOR A LARGER SHARE OF THE CURRICULUM PIE FOR REMODELLED, INTEGRATED GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES WHICH ARE ENTICING AND INTELLECTUALLY CHALLENGING. ABOVE ALL, WE NEED EDUCATIONAL LEADERS AND FACULTY WHO ARE WILLING TO TAKE WHAT MAY BE RISKS AND WHO ARE WILLING TO INVEST THE TREMENDOUS TIME AND ENERGY NECESSARY TO ALLOW US TO GO BEYOND LIP SERVICE TO GENERAL EDUCATION AND TO COME CLOSER TO THAT IDEAL OF EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY IN MASS HIGHER EDUCATION.

ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR JUNIOR COLLEGES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

MAY 18 1984

8118 Math-Sciences Building
Los Angeles, California 90024

Presented by Richard K. Greenfield, Chancellor, St. Louis Community College District, March 29, 1984, at the National Workshop on General Education & Mission of Community Colleges, Princeton University